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TAGS: PGOV KDEM PHUM MD

SUBJECT: "WHAT CAN WE DO?" FRUSTRATED ANTI-COMMUNISTS WILL BLOCKADE LOCAL ELECTION

REFS: A. Chisinau 1380, B. Chisinau 1155, C. Chisinau 990, D.

Chisinau 866

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

**¶1.** (SBU) Summary: Frustrated by ruling-party machinations that have excluded a popular, twice-reelected mayor from running again, democratic activists in the town of Buteni are planning to boycott and blockade the fourth-round election on December 16. We are advising restraint and sending an unofficial observer. We are also deeply concerned about the challenge to electoral freedom. End summary.

Popular Town Mayor Can't Win for Winning

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**¶2.** (SBU) Anatolie Postolachi, born in 1972, served two successful terms (1999-2007) as an independent mayor of Buteni, a town of 3,500 which lies 30 km southwest of Chisinau. He improved roads, arranged telephone and gas connections, and started preschool food programs. To run for a third four-year term in June's elections, he was required by law to become a member of a political party, and so joined the centrist Our Moldova Alliance (AMN). He won handily in the June 3 first round, and by a two-to-one margin in the July 1 rerun, called after the losing Communist Party (PCRM) candidate successfully accused Postolachi of corruption. (The charge was that Postolachi used his own car and cell phone in the campaign.)

Voters Block Third Vote, Threaten Fourth

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**¶3.** (U) A further appeal by the PCRM led to a court cancellation of the July 1 election and to a third round, on October 14. Despite a Central Election Commission (CEC) decision allowing Postolachi to run, the Court of Appeals excluded him from the voting list. Postolachi's supporters peacefully blockaded the polling station on October 14 and forced yet another round of voting, on December 16. For the December 16 vote, only the PCRM candidate and two others (who received fewer than 100 votes each in earlier rounds) will be on the ballot.

Frustrated, Angry Voters: "What Can We Do?"

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**¶4.** (SBU) A clearly frustrated trio of Buteni voters visited us on December 11 to vent their frustrations and to threaten further direct action to prevent voters from approaching the polling station on December 16. They described family feuds over the issue, a febrile atmosphere in the town, and heavy-handed PCRM influence over the courts. They pointed out that the Hincesti raion (district), in which Buteni lies, is the country's largest raion controlled by non-Communists, and is the latest focus of ongoing PCRM efforts to

win back lost raions by manipulating elections or packing the candidate list. The three agreed that a second attempt to block voters could look undemocratic, and might provoke a violent response from police under orders from frustrated Communist Party officials. However, they concluded, "What else can we do?" (Note: They hinted that anti-Communists might turn out as a pitchfork brigade. At their request, we are sending an unofficial observer to watch the opening of polls on Sunday, and will report septel. End note.)

Comment

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¶5. (SBU) In the first few months after the June elections, when the PCRM lost control of two thirds of the raions (ref D), including Hincesti, the ruling party for the most part licked its wounds quietly, and let the anti-Communist coalitions carry on with business (refs B and C). Only President Voronin's comments, made in the summer, about favoring PCRM-run raions in the distribution of funds from Chisinau, broke the general calm. The November 18 election in Rezina (ref A), in which the PCRM regained control of a northern raion, and the upcoming election in Buteni indicate that the gloves are slowly coming off in the PCRM's campaign to regain power. The ruling party's budget squeeze on Chisinau Mayor Chirtoaca is another sign of the PCRM's unhappiness with its loss of power in the raions and its willingness to employ underhanded tactics to regain its political predominance. We are pleased that the Central Election Commission has been willing to oppose the government, but recognize that it does not have the power, in and of itself, to reverse what increasingly looks like an ominous trend.

Kirby